

Writers in Paris: Nonfiction Workshop
Instructor: Meghan O'Rourke
Tues-Thurs 3:30-6 pm

Creative Nonfiction Workshop

We'll be writing in Paris, using our surroundings and our estrangement from home, asking what makes prose "literary nonfiction" as we write exercises and one longer piece. How do different genres and forms enable us to tell different kinds of stories, and why? As both writers and readers we'll explore a range of literary forms and play with voice, form, and structure. Being a good writer means being a good reader—so we'll be reading other work and each other's work closely.

Texts:

Handouts

Writing: regular exercises; personal essay; lyric essay.

Grading: Your grade will be based 50% on attendance and participation, 50% on written assignments. Since this is a four-week, intensive course, attendance is mandatory. (**If your absence is unavoidable** email me and the program office in advance.) Participation means *active* participation. Workshop can't function without active voices, so I expect you to make the effort to speak up. (Please speak to me if you anticipate this being a problem.)

All written homework should be printed out in a professional manner, proofread, double-spaced, with your name on it, page-numbered etc. Please have the program office make \ copies to distribute in class. **YOUR STORIES MUST BE XEROXED AND DISTRIBUTED TO THE CLASS THE SESSION BEFORE THE ONE IN WHICH THEY WILL BE WORKSHOPPED.** (This is so we will have time to read and edit them.)

Attendance: Students are required to attend all classes **punctually**. Any absences must be arranged ahead of time or accompanied by a medical or dean's excuse.

Class 1: Introductory Class and in class exercises (voice, first person).

Read for next class: John McPhee, "The Search for Marvin Gardens"; James Baldwin on Paris from *Notes from a Native Son*, D. J. Waldie *Holy Land* handout

Written homework: 2-3 pp. Paris exercise in which place/setting, intersects with plot or theme, as it does in the Antin and McPhee. Make your Paris distinctive/original—avoid clichés.

Class 2: Paris assignment due. Discussion, in-class exercises (effaced narrator).

Read for Class 3: Hemingway, handout.

Exercise: Write a 2 pp piece about a secret you have always kept in which the *style* is as important as the revelation. You can write elliptically.

Class 3: Secret exercises due: N.B. BRING COPIES TO CLASS FOR EVERYONE!

Workshop Paris exercises, discuss reading, Secret exercises.

Assignment: 1-2 pp Eavesdropping on conversation in cafes etc. woven together with movie dialogue or external material about nostalgia/estrangement. Start working on personal essay.

Class 4: CLASS TRIP

Read for Class 5: Anne Carson, “The Glass Essay”; Kathryn Schulz, “When Things Go Missing”; Eggers, Intro to “Heartbreaking Work”; Didion “Goodbye To All That”

Assignment: Work on personal essay.

Class 5: Workshop eavesdropping/nostalgia. Personal essay discussion.

Read for Class 6: Jhumpa Lahiri, Francisco Cantu from *Bajadas*

Visual assignment: Find three pieces of art in Paris museums that do something you’d like to be able to do in writing or inspire you aesthetically. Bring postcard / image to class. For exercise.

Class 6: Workshop personal essay. In-class visual exercise.

Read for Class 7: Handout; Gertrude Stein, from *Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*.

Write: Lyric essay w/external narrative.

Class 7: Workshop personal essays.

Read for Class 8: Annie Dillard, Eclipse, Als on Baldwin.

Write: Lyric essay.

Class 8: **Lyric Essays—3-4 pp** due. Discuss reading and revising.